



*"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world"*

Nelson Mandela

***Driving Ambition***  
***How to get started!***



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# 1. What is Driving Ambition

## 1.1 Why we started

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) has underlined the need for business to become more involved in education. The “Driving Ambition” initiative does that. It encourages young people to aspire to either educational paths or careers they might not have known existed in business. It nurtures in young people the skills to take their place in society.

Driving Ambition has come to exemplify the principles underpinning the RSA academies and many of the features of new ways of learning currently showcased in RSA education events. These are concerned with improving teaching and learning through purposeful partnerships, enabling learners to achieve a broad range of skills in a spirit of open-minded enquiry. The RSA Fellowship provides a unique opportunity for these priorities to be achieved by connecting teachers and learners to people, places and issues beyond the school gate.

Managed by the RSA North Oxfordshire Group, the project started in 2011 when a group of Fellows decided they should start a project that would benefit the local community. Two local schools expressed an interest in working with us, to help raise the level of ambition amongst their pupils. At the launch event in May 2012, our keynote speaker, local MP and RSA Fellow, Sir Tony Baldry referred to a “mutuality of interests”, where pupils could learn from industry and industry could learn from pupils. This in reality is what has been happening.

## 1.2 How we started

We started by holding regular monthly meetings in a local pub in Banbury, there would usually be about six Fellows and a member of staff from the local school. Without staff participation and support, the project cannot work. We have had several instances where schools have been keen to work with us but have failed to allocate dedicated resources to the project, as a result these partnerships have failed.

We started with one of the easier things to set up, mentoring. We then moved on to some project and subject support activities.

From a staff perspective, Anna Willett, Faculty Director Business Studies at the North Oxfordshire Academy (NOA) talks of her pupils really benefitting from having “someone different in the classroom, with specialist knowledge and industry experience”. Businesses involved in the scheme also see its benefits. Maxine Cameron, Director at brand marketing consultancy New Tradition, said “It gives us access to a generation we wouldn’t necessarily always have access to. They have a different way of thinking about things, which helps to open our minds a little bit and helps us think differently”.

Benefits to students are wide-ranging. One example is Daniel Pearson from NOA. At 17, Daniel had limited experience of speaking to an adult audience so lacked confidence. Working with his RSA Mentor, he developed the confidence to engage his audience when invited to speak at the Career Academy Training Conference.

An unanticipated spin-off benefit has been that two of the Fellows who have been involved with Driving Ambition have now become School Governors and this will undoubtedly facilitate an understanding of where local schools' priorities lie and where Fellows' support can have maximum benefit.

### 1.3 Where are we active

#### North Oxfordshire Academy – Banbury.

We have been working with the academy since 2011



#### Oxford Spires Academy – Oxford

We have started work with this Academy in September 2018



## 2. What do we do?

### 2.1 Mentoring

Probably the easiest place to start.

We are currently mentoring in two schools:

- North Oxfordshire Academy Banbury
- Oxford Spires Academy Oxford

To start the mentoring process, you need people in your group prepared to mentor and students from the school who feel they would benefit from it.

Mentoring usually involves meeting the students on a regular basis, usually around once a month but can be varied according to needs.

Mentoring is about helping the student:

- Understand some of the options available as they move forward e.g. discussions around university vs apprenticeship vs getting a job.
- Helping develop personal statements and CV's.
- Bringing your work and life experiences into discussions to help guide the student in discussions about their future.
- Encouraging the student to broaden their horizons.



## 2.2 Assessment Centre

More complex to arrange but for Fellows the investment of time is limited to the day of the event (and potentially a feedback session the next day) and is of great benefit to the students.

Many companies and universities are using assessment days to help evaluate and select new recruits. It was felt that the students at NOA and Oxford Spires were not experienced in this technique.

The day is complex to arrange in terms of getting sufficient “observers” to monitor the students and good facilities within the school to run the event. However, when the event has been run once, the resources and know-how will be available for future events.

We have now run three Assessment Centre days at NOA and one at Oxford Spires the day consisted of:

- Mock interviews.
- Problem solving in small groups.
- Individual presentations.
- Group problem solving and presentations to encourage team work and collaboration.

The day was great success with positive feedback from both the students and the activity leaders.



## 2.3 Projects

### Art in the Community

Nick Mead, an educationist and Fellow working on the Driving Ambition project, wanted to widen the benefits of the project to the Art curriculum. The approach to be taken was through the commissioning of art work in a real-world context.

#### 2013 – 14

- It was agreed that a real-world commission would fit the specifications of the first year of the Art A Level and the context would be the Horton General Hospital in Banbury.
- The Rowan Day Hospital room at the Horton was in need of new art work to enhance the environment for mainly local elderly patients attending the day clinic.
- A meeting with the Art Department, the students and the matron of the day unit at the hospital, agreed that an appropriate theme for the commission would be buildings in the town, including the hospital and factories where patients may have worked.
- There followed a period of research which involved seeking advice and archive material from the staff of Banbury Museum. Over the academic year three A level art students worked on pieces using a range of mediums and styles which explore associations with two local factories as well as the hospital building itself.
- The pictures are now on permanent display at the hospital.



## STEM Days

One of the Fellows, Jon Carlton, who has over 35 years' experience in the Electricity and Gas industry, has been a key player in supporting staff at NOA with additional content for the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and maths) curriculum.

The types of projects that have been run are:

- National Grid running full day exercises in the provision of electricity to communities. This is based on a model of the community and the students have to assess costs, environmental issues and physical constraints on the provision of the service.
- The Academy was provided with a series of robotics kits, enabling a cross-curricular after-school club to be set up for students to construct and compete with the robots. The science, engineering and computing faculties and key staff were all involved. The project was judged by young professional STEM graduates from private industry.
- Visits to the National Grid facilities, in recent years this has concentrated on female students as a way of encouraging more girls to take an interest in some of the key STEM subjects.





### 3D Printing

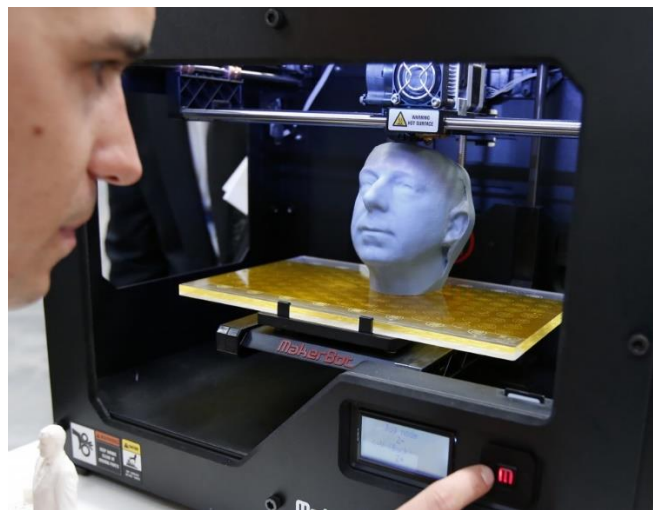
A 3D printer was donated to the Academy in a project set up by the South-Central Region of the RSA.

Activities took place at NOA. Dave Murphy, who ran the project also visited a number of local Primary schools to show the pupils what a 3D printer can do and how they might change the future of how things are made.

What do students think?

"With 3D printing I can try over and over again until it is perfect, nearly for free, without harming the environment." David Gibbons Year 10

"3D printing technology is helping me engage in Engineering in a meaningful way so I can go on to create my own opportunities" Charlie Ellington Year 7



### Making a video for NFU

In September 2013, NFU provided our students with a commission to produce a 'live' social media video as part of NFU's Road Safety Campaign for 2014. This project allowed the students to be involved in a 'real world' campaign, with all the pressures and professionalism that this entails; plus, as this project was closely linked to the Level 3 Media qualification, the students were able to up their game to allow them to access the highest marks available.

After having completed hours of rehearsal, hours in the editing suite and filming on location, the students were thoroughly prepared to take to the floor and present not only the videos, but all of their reasoning, decision making and how they matched the requirements of the brief.

The students presented the finished videos to the CEO of NFU Mutual, Mr Lindsay Sinclair, who chose the one he thought most appropriate to use in the campaign.

NFU were very impressed at the maturity, professionalism and exceptionally high standard of workmanship and presentational skills.



## 2.4 Banbury Literary Live

Probably the most complex and time-consuming project we run and is now a successful annual event.

North Oxfordshire Academy Helping Ignite a Passion for Literature.

North Oxfordshire Academy proudly opened its doors to the local community in September 2013, to celebrate and ignite a passion for literature. Organisers from North Oxfordshire Academy, all of whom have a lifelong love of reading, felt that Banbury was long overdue for a literary event that would not only help foster increased reading ages for children and teenagers, but that would spark a renewed interest in reading for adults too (in particular parents).

‘Banbury Literary Live’ saw a whole host of top authors inspiring readers of all ages to pick up a book and read for pleasure. With the emphasis very much on the word ‘live’, the event not only included a wide range of literary activities such as performance poetry, creative writing workshops, storytelling, book signings and talks from the authors themselves, but also featured a whole showcase of natural young talent from the school: bands, solo artists, dancers and theatrical performances throughout the course of the day. The event, which was the first literary event of its kind in Banbury was a great success.

The event has run every year since. In 2018 it transferred to The Mill, the local arts centre, in Banbury.



## **3. How to get started?**

### **3.1 Local Fellows**

To make Driving Ambition a success you need a small group of Fellows to “want to make it work”.

The two teams currently in place each consist of around six “core” members with others supporting the team for certain activities.

Each team has a designated lead, sometimes chosen sometimes volunteered, the lead person usually does the following:

- Arrange the venue and meeting dates for the group, again, usually about every 4/6 weeks, it is good to find a local pub where the atmosphere is very relaxed.
- Chair the group so that the meeting runs smoothly
- Record the meeting and issue minutes/action points to the group
- Maintain contacts with RSA Region and RSA House people

The remainder of the team contribute to meetings, support activities and bring new ideas to the group about future activities.

The work load is not high, working with young people and sharing your experiences is very rewarding.

### **3.2 Local Schools**

We appreciate that staff in schools have a heavy workload and thus any Driving Ambitions initiatives must not impose a significant burden which would distract from teaching work. At the same time, RSA Fellows are volunteers who will be devoting their time to supporting schools in a part-time capacity. Companies who offer support will also want their interaction with the school to be efficient and not unduly time-consuming.

Experience with Driving Ambition has shown that the concept does not work well if responsibility for co-ordination and communication with RSA Fellows and Companies is spread piecemeal across a number of staff members. What works well is for there to be a single nominated member of staff who will act as the focal point for communicating the school’s priorities and needs to the RSA Fellows and for co-ordinating with Fellows and Companies who are providing specific support. The other necessary pre-condition is that the Headteacher and Senior Leaders in the school understand and support the Driving Ambition interventions aimed at their school. Without this senior level support frustration will be experienced by all parties. Conversely, if this support exists and is visible there are likely to be very positive results, with the school feeling the benefit and leading to further beneficial interventions. Indeed the “focal point” teacher will rely on regular dialogue with the Senior Leaders so that priorities for Driving Ambition support can be accurately communicated in a timely fashion.

Schools will have different priorities and needs from time to time. In any one area, the RSA Fellows will have particular backgrounds and contacts which may align with some, but not all, of those school priorities. So, the alignment of needs and offerings will require regular and open dialogue between the RSA Fellows' group and the "focal point" for the school.

There is only so much that can be conveyed in writing. Any schools interested in joining Driving Ambition would be well advised to contact those who have already made the concept work for them, so they can learn more of the benefits and potential pitfalls.

A particularly useful contact for schools is RSA Fellow Joanne Thorne, who is a member of the Driving Ambition North Oxfordshire team, as well as providing the "focal point" role for North Oxfordshire Academy. Jo can be contacted at [joanne.thorne@northoxfordshire-academy.org](mailto:joanne.thorne@northoxfordshire-academy.org)



### 3.3 Support from the RSA

If you're considering getting activity started in your area, support is available from your [Area Manager](#) and [Fellowship Councillors](#). Get in touch and they can help connect you with relevant Fellows and talk through possibilities.

In the first instance, you may wish to write a [news story](#) or [blog](#) outlining your idea with a clear call to action, which RSA staff can then help promote through newsletters and social media. Do also keep an eye out for opportunities to "pitch" your idea at RSA Ideas and RSA Engage [events in your area](#).

Be sure to [update your MyRSA Profile](#) with your interests and include search terms such as "Driving Ambition" to help others find you easily. When you're looking to form a group in your area, you can search for Fellows in a certain radius from your postcode using the [Find a Fellow function](#) and message them directly through MyRSA. You may also wish lead an [RSA Meetup](#) in your area to bring people together in person – contact your Area Manager to explore this.

Our [Fellowship Resources page](#) includes in-depth information about leading RSA activity. Everything you need to know can be found there – from helping you to understand how resources are allocated, Fellowship projects and events to support our charitable aims (in the Fellowship Handbook).

**WANT TO LEARN MORE?**

**Please go to our website at  
Drivingambition.org.uk**

**Go to the “How to get involved” button and send us a message.**

